

Graduation surprise for preschoolers

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This week, nearly 200 Del Norte County children moving on from pre-school to kindergarten are receiving backpacks and t-shirts during drive-by graduations thanks to the work of the Del Norte Child Care Council (DNCCC) and funding from Wild Rivers Community Foundation (WRCF).

“With graduation ceremonies involving large crowds cancelled because of COVID-19, our hearts broke for the littles,” said Melodee Mitchell, the Del Norte Child Care Council’s executive director. “This is a big milestone and we didn’t want our littles and their parents to miss out.”

The DNCCC and the WRCF’s 3READ23 Literacy Initiative is working with local preschools, churches and tribes that have scheduled drive-by graduation ceremonies this week. Participating schools include Mary Peacock, Joe Hamilton, Little School of the Redwoods and Smith River schools. A total of 189 youngsters will graduate from preschool to kindergarten, according to Jessica Ortiz, 3Read23 Literacy Initiative coordinator.

The backpacks were assembled by the teachers and delivered to preschool sites, including extra backpacks for preschoolers already enrolled for the following year.

“In all of their little backpacks, they’re receiving from the school district kindergarten registration forms,” Mitchell said.

The teachers will also give students t-shirts, which read “Readers Become Leaders” on the front and “Kindergarten Here I Come!” on the back, during drive-up events.

At each school site, teachers and volunteers will follow strict health and safety guidelines and protocols required from their school superintendent. This may include some school sites allowing only one teacher per class to distribute the graduation amenities, and must require face masks, gloves and sanitizer.

“Though it may not have the weight of a high school graduation, Del Norte’s youngest students are celebrating a milestone that’s no less important in the time of COVID-19,” Mitchell said.

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